

Carnahan Talks Social Security, Budget Cuts Congressman speaks to district residents at Webster University

By: Don Corrigan

Editor, Webster-Kirkwood & South County Times

U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, 3rd District, took aim at administration plans for Social Security and budget cuts in Medicaid and transportation in an address to district residents on Monday evening.

"We need an honest debate about Social Security," Carnahan told an audience in Webster University's Sunnen Lounge. "One in six of residents in this district receive some form of Social Security benefits.

"The fact is Social Security is not broken," added Carnahan. "From the president's own words the system is sound for another half century -- and with some minor adjustments, it can be sound for many more years."

Carnahan said the battle over Social Security is not a partisan fight, because many Republican legislators are as alarmed as Democrats over "privatization schemes." Carnahan said just the cost of setting up a new private accounts bureaucracy will bust a budget that is already far out of balance.

Also under fire Tuesday night were Bush plans to cut another \$60 billion from Medicaid support. Carnahan said you don't have to be a bleeding heart to feel empathy for older folks struggling to keep needed, but costly, prescription drugs in the medicine cabinet.

"Set your compassion aside," said Carnahan. "Put on your economic hat. When people can't pay for their medicine and don't get their drugs, they usually get very sick. They end up in hospitals and emergency rooms -- they clog up the health system -- and health care becomes much more costly."

Carnahan said that while most Americans may be proud of efforts to rebuild Iraq, they also are fearful that our economic life is unraveling here at home. He cited cuts in tuition support as college costs spiral, as well as lack of funding for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to improve education for younger students.

"NCLB is a failure," declared Carnahan. "It is an unfunded federal mandate. Last week I met with school board members from our area who were visiting Washington.

"While they agree with some of the goals of NCLB, they see what is actually happening," said Carnahan. "They want less rhetoric, more resources."

Carnahan also pounced on Bush administration positions on science studies and stem cell research. He said such research is about finding medical cures, "it's not about human cloning." He said that will be his position as a new member of the U.S House committee on science.

Audience Questions

In a question-and-answer period with district constituents, and later with Webster University journalism majors, Carnahan was asked how he would find the revenue to shore up programs on the chopping block in the Bush budget unveiled this week.

Carnahan joined Democratic leaders in Congress who are calling for a rollback of Bush tax cuts that translate into as much as \$150,000 in cuts for those with million-dollar incomes.

"We have federal tax cuts in a time of war -- and they mostly benefit those who need them least," said Carnahan. "Those income tax cuts should be suspended in the economic times that we are in."

Amtrak passenger service is hit hard in the proposed Bush budget. The elimination of federal operating subsidies would kill many long-distance routes, including those between St. Louis and Kansas City and St. Louis and Chicago. Missouri has 12 Amtrak stations, including a popular location in Kirkwood, that served almost 450,000 passengers last year. State legislators have battled for several years to keep the passenger service alive.

"I've been a strong supporter of Amtrak for a very long time," said Carnahan, who served in Missouri's statehouse. "I think there is a broad constituency for this service in my district and in St. Louis.

"It's important that we have diverse transportation options in this country," added Carnahan. "It is absolutely a national security issue."

A number of Webster students expressed concern about whether there will be jobs available when they graduate, after losses in the state attributable to job outsourcing to other countries.

"The government cannot stop jobs from going overseas," said Carnahan. "But we can stop the incentives that give companies a reason to ship jobs overseas. We should not only stop these incentives, we should provide incentives and reward companies that keep jobs here and the create new jobs here."

2004 Election Analysis

The election of Carnahan in the third district, and the election of his sister, Robin Carnahan, to secretary of state, were among the few bright spots for Democrats in a Republican year in the in the 2004 elections in Missouri.

Carnahan was asked whether the election losses were due to Democrats being on the wrong side of social wedge issues such as abortion, gay marriage or gun rights.

"I have a different analysis," said Carnahan. "I think the primary issue that Republicans were able to use to divert attention from pocketbook issues were the Iraqi war and the war on terrorism.

"For example, I met a woman who owns a beauty salon, and she told me that because of Iraq and terrorism, she was voting for Bush," recalled Carnahan. "But then she told me she could not wait for the next election when she was going to work for Hillary."

However, Carnahan said it was far too early to speculate whether Hillary Clinton would be the party's nominee for president in 2008. He also told students that the 2004 election showing should not depress young Democrats.

"Even though we lost the election, some incredible things happened," said Carnahan. "We had record voter registrations, record numbers of volunteers, record numbers of people who voted."

"I expect we will have an open race in 2008 and maybe as many as a dozen candidates for president," added Carnahan. "I also expect we will see some new candidates, maybe Evan Bayh from Indiana or some other candidates who would do well in battleground states. And Missouri is an important battleground state."